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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [KDEM](#) [NATO](#) [EU](#) [BK](#)
SUBJECT: BOSNIA - TIME TO ASSIGN A U.S. GENERAL OFFICER TO
NATO HQ SARAJEVO

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English. Reasons. 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) I have argued that it remains critical to U.S. interests for a U.S. general officer to command NATO HQ Sarajevo. We did not succeed in keeping that post last year, however, and an Italian general officer assumed command of NATO HQ on January 14. After that decision was taken my hope had been that we would be able to identify an American general officer, who could lead on defense reform, to serve as the Italian's deputy. We could then have bid that same American against the Commander's slot in the 2009 "Flags to Posts" exercise. However, I understand that there have been difficulties with the services identifying someone for the Deputy slot. I have also learned that the April 28 Balkans Manning Conference will double this year as the "Flags to Posts" conference for the region. I urge that the U.S. reassert its leadership within the Alliance on Bosnia, and on April 28, bid an American general officer for NATO HQ Sarajevo.

¶2. (C/NF) We have argued this point before, but it merits repetition. Bosnia has been heading in the wrong direction for almost three years now. There has been a sharp and dangerous rise in nationalist rhetoric, reforms have stalled (in some cases there has been backsliding), and Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats have laid out sharply different visions of Bosnia's future as a state. These developments increasingly threaten to derail our "Euro-Atlantic strategy" for ensuring Bosnia does not again become a source of conflict in the region.

¶3. (C/NF) At the same time, a dangerous leadership vacuum is opening up within the international community presence in Bosnia. The Office of the High Representative's (OHR) authorities have atrophied over the last three years under weak European leadership, and OHR is likely to transition to a weaker European Union Special Representative (EUSR) by the end of 2009. In any case, attempting to manage Bosnia and its festering problems through an EUSR or relying solely on the EU accession process to break the political deadlock in Bosnia is inadequate. The EU accession process is passive, not pro-active; there is no evidence that the lure of the EU is sufficient to overcome entrenched ethnic differences here; and finally, the prospect of EU membership is so distant that it is unlikely to substantially impact the political climate.

14. (C/NF) That leaves NATO the only credible game in town, at least in the near-term, when it comes to pursuing our Euro-Atlantic strategy for muting Bosnia's potential ethnic differences. Given the U.S. role as the unquestioned leader of the Alliance, it provides us with a natural vehicle for exercising our influence in Bosnia provided we are prepared to assume the mantle of leadership. NATO's role in ending the war, and NATO HQ's success in implementing the first phase of defense reform and forging a unified Bosnian Armed Forces, give NATO a credibility that the EU and its various ESDP elements, including EUFOR, lack in Bosnia. But Bosnians also remember that it was NATO under U.S. command, backed by vigorous U.S. bilateral diplomacy, that accomplished these goals. It is the U.S. presence that makes it "NATO" to the Bosnians; anything else is just "Euro." The change to European leadership at NATO HQ only underscored that point for the Bosnians. NATO HQ Sarajevo has not been effective under European leadership in keeping defense reform on track.

15. (C/NF) The April 28 "Flags to Posts" exercise provides us with an opportunity to reassert American leadership in an institution and on issues where we have a long track record of success and where our interests in Bosnia are critically engaged. Absent more robust U.S. engagement and leadership here, we would have to rely on the Europeans to get the job done in Bosnia, and quite frankly, they are not up to the task.

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